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ONLINE REFERENCE INFORMATION SERVICE DELIVERY AND LIBRARY
USERS' SATISFACTION IN A CHANGING WORLD: THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, OGBOMOSO
IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Internet has significantly influenced every aspect of human life, while the present era is characterized by information evolution. Efforts to measure up with the quest for information become a herculean task with the traditional reference information service. However, the traditional reference service has undergone a massive facelift with the introduction of the Internet. The concept of online reference information service is an expert way of providing for users' information needs through the mediation of a reference librarian. While online reference information service has had a share in innovation, reference librarians are confronted with meeting users' information needs by embracing their new roles. The study investigated the perception and satisfaction level of online reference information service users and how to satisfy the information needs of users in NBTS. The study was delimited to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, in scope, and the study sample was drawn from students and other library users in the community. Based on the findings, online reference services through user education must be prioritized in today's library system. Cooperation of online reference librarians with both local and international online reference librarians is also of utmost importance. In conclusion, the study pointed out the indispensable roles of reference librarians in satisfying users' information needs in the changing world.

Keywords: Online Reference Information, Service Delivery, Library Users' Satisfaction,.

Introduction

The world is evolving, premised on advancement in technology. Sequel to this, many things are embedded. Compliance with the new normal becomes a certainty for any field to be considered effective and efficient in contemporary society. Ironically, as there are myriads of importance attached to the digital world, a handful of accompanying challenges seek redress for better exploration. Indeed, reference service has had its fair share of innovation (Madu et al. 2020, 145).

Moreover, this has dramatically impacted reference service, approaches, and expectations of both the librarians and users (Serwaa et al. 2022, 7). While it is crucial to enjoy technological advantages, it is also essential to consider the how. As this is borne in mind, users' satisfaction becomes a primary target of the reference service in that it is apt to provide for users' need for convenient access to resources (Dawar 2013). In the changing world, virtually all human activities grapple with the challenges of satisfying their clients.

The online reference information service concept is not a new whim estranged from the physical library. According to Penka (2003), its operation through the Internet dates back to the mid-1990s consisting of email addresses only. Though still in its formative stage, it is a well-established part of the traditional environment. The advent of Internet technology has drastically influenced normal library activities. According to Awodoyin et al. (2018, 1), reference service aims to expose library users to information needed to ensure quality service. Delivering library reference service is a crucial part of the concept in ensuring users' satisfaction. Hence, an upshift in reference service does not render reference librarians redundant; instead, it has made their roles more challenging (Ayeni 2015, 113). Expectations have grown with online reference services; hence, reference librarians have become determinant factors for meeting this information needs.

Online reference information service has been approached from different perceptions. While other studies have investigated the current level of online reference services and analyzed quality reference service delivery, this study explores online reference information services to ensure effective delivery for users' satisfaction. The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary is a Christian higher institution where called and spirit-led persons are trained for ministry work. The study investigates the perception and satisfaction level of online reference information services users. To achieve this, the researcher reviewed some relevant literature on online reference

information services, discussed the research method, collected data analyzed, and discussed findings before concluding with recommendations for further studies.

Statement of the Problem

Online reference information services have drawn the attention of many researchers from different perspectives. While some previous studies focus on analyzing quality reference service delivery, challenges, and prospects of online reference service, determining the relationship between reference information service delivery, there is yet a gap left unfilled. Therefore, this researcher investigated how to deliver online reference information services for users' satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The study focused on delivering online reference information services to satisfy users' information needs. In order to achieve this, the study considers the following objectives:

- i. interrogate the level of Awareness of online reference information services in the NBTS
- ii. find out the perception of NBTS Library Users on the relevance of online reference information service
- iii. determine the effectiveness of online reference information service in the NBTS
- iv. find out the satisfactory level of online reference information service users in the NBTS

Delimitation

This study was delimited to the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in scope, and the study sample was drawn from students of the same institution and other library users in the community.

Relevant Literature Review

The library is the center-heart of any institution that delivers learning resources, essential information sources, facilities, and services to users (Usono, 2019, 25). By providing print, non-print, and electronic information services, libraries help institutions achieve academic goals and other purposes. Similarly, online reference information service is a section of traditional library establishment intended for users' preferred needs, as Preston (2020, 1) affirmed. The concept is known by different names like digital reference, virtual reference, or online reference, which is relatively new to library service (Sherikar, et al. 2006, 441). Many things have taken a new turn with Internet technology, not excluding public and academic library services.

A digital library can be considered the offshoot of the traditional library. The traditional reference service is one-on-one interaction whereby the reference librarian helps the user with a variety of available sources to meet the information needs (Maharana, et al. 1). With this type of reference service are certain limitations, as Dhawle et al. (2014, 17) mentioned, due to its provision of mono-media, that is only print service and services provided from the library collection only. Other limiting factors are a lack of global access to information and limitation in resource-sharing projects undertaken due to print media. However, the traditional reference service has undergone a massive facelift with the emergence of the Internet. Sahabi et al. (2021, 52) posited that reference service has become more accessible to satisfy users by breaking the boundaries of time and location.

The great demand for information in this era is humongous. Information evolution is a significant factor that has undoubtedly influenced the change in library operations and services, which, according to Berube (2003), in the words of Oluwawuyi (2017, 7), is a healthy justification for online information services in libraries. Online reference service is a network of expertise, intermediation, and resources placed at library users' disposal; those seeking answers online (Sherikar et al. 2006, 442). In corroboration, Jabir (2008, 176) substantiates that users through the library web can access the reference service in the comfort of their homes, schools, or offices. Furthermore, some online reference services place answers to frequently asked questions, selected reference tools, and selected databases on the website. The online reference service supports users in quenching the thirst for defective material in traditional libraries.

The essential position libraries hold in various institutions puts Librarians indispensably in the place to determine the quality of institutions' academic programs. In the words of Usoro (2019, 27), reference service makes provision for library information saddling librarians with the task of delivering quality service to meet users' information needs and to determine whether the needs meet the intended purposes. As Oluwawuyi (2017, 67) observed, improving the traditional reference service does not change the librarians' goal; it has expanded its application areas. The level of expertise of a reference librarian is also a determining factor for library users' satisfaction. Meanwhile, internet technology has introduced much flexibility in the reference information service, which Dhawle (2014, 18) identified as the need of the present era as information resources are being made available in digital form.

Delivering Online Reference Information Service

The task of satisfying the information needs of reference information services brings to the fore the need for methods that enable smooth delivery. In the words of Oluwawuyi (2017, 27), although the traditional goals of maintaining libraries may not change, the traditional methods need to

experience a paradigm shift. Minding the transformation of internet technology, it is apparent that the traditional methods fall short of the current expectation. Madu et al. (2020, 148) identified two methods of delivering online reference services, namely Asynchronous transactions and Synchronous transactions; meanwhile, Jabir (2008, 177) and Maharana et al. (n.d., 3) upgraded with an addition of Collaborative Networks.

- i. Asynchronous transactions entail email, web forms, and ask a service.
- ii. Synchronous transactions entail chat reference using simple technologies, chat reference using web contact software, video conferencing or web camera services, and digital reference robots.
- iii. Collaborative Networks: With collaborative networks, many libraries and organizations recognize the benefits of providing digital reference services. It is an international network of libraries, consortia, museums, and task services that uses a help desk system to answer questions and apposite institutions on member profiles.

There are processes involved in delivering online reference services. For online reference information services to run effectively, specific processes are briefly given below; according to Oluwawuyi (2017, 73),

1. Informing: information is power. Existing services within the library ought to be readily available through an informative medium provided by the librarians.
2. Planning: procedural processes, methods, and policies regarding the organization's goal must be necessary.
3. Training: Staff training in the delivery of quality online reference service is non-negotiable. Developing a training plan for fruitful service for users' satisfaction is pivotal.

4. Prototyping: Prototyping involves running a preliminary test of the service before its commencement. In order not to run into early failure, conducting a pilot test is necessary.
5. Contributing: Creating Awareness is a means of acquainting the users with the intricacies of accessing the needed information.
6. Evaluating: Evaluation is crucial in keeping any organization running. Regular and proper service evaluation is essential for improving the service rendered.

Delivering online reference services does not go without its challenges, as Gbaje (2007) noted that Nigerian library services have not yet witnessed "online information literacy instructions, online course reserve, online reference services, online conferencing, and online weblog" (Asoronye et al. 2016, 9). Generally, they are insufficient financial resources, inadequately qualified librarians, lack of skilled personnel, low internet connectivity, and epileptic power supply (Egunjobi et al. 2022). High maintenance costs and violation of copyright regulations are other challenges (Sahabi et al. 2021, 58). Some challenges in delivering online reference services are perennial issues that affect the libraries they serve.

Library Users' Satisfaction in the Changing World

Satisfying library users has become an enormous task for libraries, especially reference librarians in internet technology. Library reference information has, in no small measure, increased the capacity of academic libraries and has been of tremendous assistance in meeting users' information needs. With regards to the Nigerian phenomenon, Asoronye et al. (2016, 9), in quoting Gbaje (2007), that internet access is epileptic, which makes online reference services quite challenging. Hence, it is germane to consider some factors worth employing by the institution to ensure that reference service users meet their expectations. The following are essential factors for library users'

satisfaction in the changing world based on some recommendations, according to Asoronye et al. (2016, 10-11); Ayanlola (2019, 32):

Regular power supply influences all aspects of online reference services. Providing a non-epileptic power supply will ensure the smooth operation of the electronic library to provide efficient online information services. Also, there is a need for alternative power generation sources considering the country's poor state of electricity supply.

Adequate funding of libraries is also one essential consideration. For effective online reference services, adequate funding cannot be overemphasized. All aspects of online service are money intensive and necessary for its smooth running. Subscriptions to relevant and current databases, new software purchases, constant software and hardware upgrades, high bandwidth sizes, and many other necessities should be adequately budgeted to maintain library facilities.

Human resource is vital to the success of any establishment. It is essential to emphasize the training of library personnel and users' skills. Acquiring accurate information, communication technology skills, and effective managerial influence equips library personnel to maximize the service for users' satisfaction effectively, while skills possessed help harness rich resources in the online reference service for users.

Research Method

A descriptive survey research method was used for this study on Online Reference Information Service Delivery and Library User Satisfaction in a Changing World: The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso in Perspective. This study selected the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, a prestigious institution with an extensive collection of materials in her library serving the seminary's staff and students, as well as the pastors and employees of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and other the Seminary family. All the students of the institution mentioned above made up the study's population.

This study's sample consisted of some students who used the library's reference section at the time it was carried out. They are made up of both undergraduate and postgraduate students from various levels and programs. The sample is representative because the institution's students from all levels and programmes were represented. A total number of 20 questionnaires were distributed among the students, and all were retrieved. Postgraduate students accounted for 12 of the total, while undergraduate students accounted for 8. The instrument was administered to the respondents at the library's reference section and retrieved with the library staff's help. Meanwhile, the various questionnaire categories' responses were analyzed under different sections. The procedures for data analysis are simple percentages expressed in tabular form.

Data Analysis

The result of the findings to be covered here cuts across various sections of the instrument employed to generate responses for the study and is analyzed in tabular form sequentially.

Research Question 1: What is the level of Awareness of online reference information in NBTS?

Table 1: Level of Awareness of online reference information service in the NBTS

<i>Statement</i>	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	Cum. A Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	Cum. D Freq (%)
In the NBTS, there are avenues for library users to access information regarding referencing services online	6(30.0)	12(60.0)	18(90.0)	1(5.0)	1(5.0)	2(10.0)
NBTS library is not limited only to analogue library information but mainly uses electronic-based information service	6(30.0)	10(50.0)	16(80.0)		4(20.0)	4(20.0)

Appropriate information sources and services online are available for the reach of library users in the NBTS	1(5.0)	12(60.0)	13(65.0)		7(35.0)	7(35.0)
Internet-based question-and-answer services for library users seeking online reference information are predominantly available without the need for any library officer	2(10.0)	7(35.0)	9(45.0)	3(15.0)	8(40.0)	11(55.0)
Online reference information service is a medium for providing needed information to library users through technology-based platforms	8(40.0)	9(45.0)	17(85.0)	1(5.0)	2(10.0)	3(15.0)
Total Cum.			73.0			27.0

Research question 1 shows the percentage level of Awareness of online reference information services in the NBTS in order of respondents' responses. "In the NBTS, there are avenues for library users to access information regarding referencing services online" has 90% as the highest cumulative score under agree. "Online reference information service is a medium for providing needed information to library users through technology-based platforms" has the second highest cumulative score of 85.0% under agree. "NBTS library is not limited only to analogue library information but mainly uses electronic-based information service" has 80.0% cumulative score. More so, the statements "Appropriate information sources and services online are available for the reach of library users in the NBTS" and "Internet-based question-and-answer services for library

users seeking online reference information are predominantly available without the need for any library officer" have cumulative scores of 65.0% and 45.0% respectively.

Research Question 2: What is the perception of NBTS library users on the relevance of online reference information service?

Table 2: Perception of NBTS library users on the relevance of online reference information service

<i>Statement</i>	SA Freq (%)	A Freq (%)	Cum. A Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	Cum. D Freq (%)
NBTS online reference service provides access to current resource materials on current research areas	4(20.0)	11(55.0)	15(75.0)		5(25.0)	5(25.0)
NBTS online reference service provides users with needed information promptly	3(15.0)	11(55.0)	14(70.0)		6(30.0)	6(30.0)
NBTS online reference service gives users access to sufficient available resource materials relevant to current research areas	2(10.0)	11(55.0)	13(65.0)	1(5.0)	6(30.0)	7(35.0)
NBTS online reference service provides an opportunity for users to have a one-on-one conversation with the reference librarian	1(5.0)	12(60.0)	13(65.0)	1(5.0)	6(30.0)	7(35.0)
NBTS online reference service librarian possesses	1(5.0)	12(60.0)	13(65.0)	3(15.0)	4(20.0)	7(35.0)

online communication skills and relates with users without cultural sentiments						
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Research question 2 shows the percentage of NBTS library users' perception of the relevance of online reference information services. The variable "NBTS online reference service provides access to current resource materials on current research areas" has 75.0% as the highest cumulative score under agree. "NBTS online reference service provides users with needed information promptly" has 70.0% as the second highest under agree; the variables "NBTS online reference service gives users access to sufficient available resource materials relevant to current research areas," "NBTS online reference service provides an opportunity for users to have a one-on-one conversation with the reference librarian" and "NBTS online reference service librarian possesses online communication skills and relates with users without cultural sentiments" all have 65.0% cumulative score under agree.

Research Question 3: What is the effectiveness of NBTS online reference information service?

Table 3: Effectiveness of online reference information service in the NBTS

<i>Statement</i>	SA	A	Cum. A	SD	D	Cum. D
	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)
The provision of personal assistance for users by online reference services dispels the trouble of searching for resources, thereby encouraging users to make do with online reference services for their research work	4(20.0)	13(65.0)	17(85.0)	1(5.0)	2(10.0)	3(15.0)

Giving instructions to users through online reference services motivates them to maximize the advantages of reference resources and services	5(25.0)	11(55.0)	16(80.0)	3(15.0)	1(5.0)	4(20.0)
Online reference service provides guidance service for users while deciding which information sources and services are most appropriate that are relevant to users' information needs	4(20.0)	12(60.0)	16(80.0)		4(20.0)	4(20.0)
The provision of internet-based question-and-answer services by online reference services gives room for dialogue and provides timely answers to questions	2(10.0)	14(70.0)	16(80.0)	1(5.0)	3(15.0)	4(20.0)
Online reference service delivers available electronic resource materials to users as against the traditional form of library service, which gives limited access to resources	3(15.0)	12(60.0)	15(75.0)	3(15.0)	2(10.0)	5(25.0)
Total Cum.			80.0			20.0

Research question 3 shows the percentage of the effectiveness of online reference information services in the NBTS. "The provision of personal assistance for users by online reference services

dispels the trouble of searching for resources, thereby encouraging users to make do with online reference services for their research work" has 85.0% as the highest cumulative score under agree. "Giving instructions to users through online reference services motivates them to maximize the advantages of reference resources and services," "Online reference service provides guidance service for users in selecting the most appropriate information sources and services that are relevant to users' information needs," and "The provision of internet-based question-and-answer services by online reference services gives room for dialogue and provides timely answers to questions" all have the same cumulative score of 80.0% under agree; meanwhile, "Online reference service delivers available electronic resource materials to users as against the traditional form of library service, which gives limited access to resources" has 75.0% cumulative score under agree.

Research Question 4: What is the satisfaction level of NBTS library users on online reference information service?

Table 4: Satisfaction level of online reference information service users in NBTS

<i>Statement</i>	HS Freq (%)	S Freq (%)	Cum. A Freq (%)	SD Freq (%)	D Freq (%)	Cum. D Freq (%)
I am satisfied with the personal assistance provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS	2(10.0)	10(50.0)	12(60.0)	2(10.0)	6(30.0)	8(40.0)
I am satisfied with the electronic-based information service provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS	2(10.0)	11(55.0)	13(65.0)	3(15.0)	4(20.0)	7(35.0)
I am satisfied with the prompt response to users' queries online reference information service of the NBTS gives	2(10.0)	11(55.0)	13(65.0)	2(10.0)	5(25.0)	7(35.0)

I am satisfied with the prompt response to users' queries online reference information service of the NBTS gives	1(5.0)	12(60.0)	13(65.0)	2(10.0)	5(25.0)	7(35.0)
I am satisfied with the functionality of databases provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS	3(15.0)	9(45.0)	12(60.0)	2(10.0)	6(30.0)	8(40.0)
Total Cum.			63.0			37.0

Research question 4 shows the percentage of Satisfaction level of online reference information service users in NBTS. "I am satisfied with the electronic-based information service provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS," "I am satisfied with the prompt response to users' queries online reference information service of the NBTS gives, "and "I am satisfied with the relevance of available E-resources provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS" have the same and highest cumulative score of 65.0% under agreement. Meanwhile, "I am satisfied with the personal assistance provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS" and "I am satisfied with the functionality of databases provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS" have the same cumulative score of 60.0%, respectively.

Discussion of Findings

Research question 1 focused on the level of Awareness of online reference information services in the NBTS. The findings revealed that "In the NBTS, there are avenues for library users to access information regarding referencing services online," "Online reference information service is a medium for providing needed information to library users through technology-based platforms," and "NBTS library is not limited only to analogue library information but mainly uses electronic-based information service" with a percentage score of 90.0%, 85.0%, and 80.0% respectively have

higher percentages which imply that the more significant number of NBTS library users are aware of online reference information service in the NBTS. Hence, this agrees with the assertion of Serwaa et al. (2022, 9), who exonerate the place of Awareness and exposure to online reference information services as an indispensable factor for promoting users' patronage. Dawar (2013) emphasized the need to draw users' attention to the service through various means such as email, pamphlets, use of notice boards, oral, and other programmes.

Research question 2 focused on the Perception of NBTS library users on the relevance of online reference information services. The findings revealed that "NBTS online reference service provides access to current resource materials on current research areas," "NBTS online reference service provides users with needed information promptly," "NBTS online reference service gives users access to sufficient available resource materials relevant to current research areas," "NBTS online reference service provides an opportunity for users to have a one-on-one conversation with the reference librarian," "NBTS online reference service librarian possesses online communication skills and relates with users without cultural sentiments" with 75.0%, 70.0%, 65.0%, 65.0%, and 65.0% respectively have higher percentage which suggests that the more significant number of NBTS library users consider online reference information service relevant. Therefore, to corroborate this, the relevance of online reference service is solely tied to the librarian's ability to interact with users personally (Cassell 2018, 4). The competency of the reference librarian is geared towards ensuring prompt response to queries, provision of current and sufficient resource materials, one-on-one service with users, and good staff users' interpersonal and practical communication skills.

Research question 3 focused on the effectiveness of online reference information services in the NBTS. The findings as revealed that "The provision of personal assistance for users by online reference services dispels the trouble of searching for resources, thereby encouraging users

to make do with online reference services for their research work", "Giving instructions to users through online reference services motivates them to maximize the advantages of reference resources and services", "Online reference service provides guidance service for users while deciding which information sources and services are most appropriate that are relevant to users' information needs", "The provision of internet-based question-and-answer services by online reference services gives room for dialogue and provides timely answers to questions" and "Online reference service delivers available electronic resource materials to users as against the traditional form of library service, which gives limited access to resources" with percentage scores of 85.0%, 80.0%, 80.0%, 80.0% and 75.0% respectively have higher percentages which show that the number of NBTS library users agree that NBTS online reference information service is highly effective. In order to substantiate this assertion, Dawar (2013) it is necessary that better attention should be given to the practical functioning of the online reference service. In order to achieve a functional online reference service, Ekwelem et al. (2018) emphasized periodic evaluation of online reference information services to meet users' information needs. Through this, user feedback will help improve services rendered by the reference service providers.

Research question 4 focused on the satisfaction level of online reference information service users in NBTS. The findings show that "I am satisfied with the electronic-based information service provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS," "I am satisfied with the prompt response to users' queries online reference information service of the NBTS gives," "I am satisfied with the prompt response to users' queries online reference information service of the NBTS gives" and "I am satisfied with the functionality of databases provided by the online reference information service of the NBTS" have 65.0%, 65.0%, 65.0%, 60.0% and 60.0/5 respectively have satisfactory percentage level which indicates users' partial satisfaction level with the online reference information service of the NBTS. Therefore, according to Awodoyin (2018, 2), the yardstick for

measuring the quality of online reference service is the satisfaction level of users. As such, online reference quality should be prioritized, with the online reference librarian going all out to ensure users' satisfaction.

Conclusion

Despite the new development in the library's reference service with the development of the Internet, online reference service has not been given equal promotion. The administration of libraries and other interested parties must consider the significance of publicizing online reference services since it primarily hinges on customer satisfaction. Information satisfaction is greatly influenced by users' knowledge of online reference resources and librarians' interpersonal abilities. Utilizing the Internet to its full potential will help satisfy user needs despite the significant financial repercussions of its development. Online references provide a significant budgetary barrier because they require an internet connection. The cost of outfitting employees is another financial worry that arises frequently. However, taking into account the significant advantages of online reference services in offering a variety of services that, if given adequate coverage, serve to meet the information demands of consumers.

Recommendations

1. Provision of a stable power supply to guarantee uninterrupted reference service to users should not be handled with kid's gloves by the library management and, by extension, the NBTS management.
2. Promoting online reference services through users' education should be considered a priority in the contemporary library setting.

3. Cooperation of online reference librarians with both local and international online reference librarians for information and partnership must be embraced in order to meet the needs of the users and do so more promptly too.
4. Incorporating innovative technologies for efficient online reference services is recommended as ideal for the 21st Century library professional and sophisticated users too.
5. Training staff for effectiveness in relationship and communication skills with reference service users should be supported by the relevant authorities to ensure quality reference service delivery.
6. Online reference service users should be opened for feedback and the result used by management and other stakeholders to know its effectiveness and for improvement on the service.
7. Employment of online reference librarians and staff with consideration of technological vibrancy and competence should be the concern of the NBTS library management to be able to provide state-of-the-art reference services to its numerous clients.

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